

PublicOpinion

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Nuclear Energy 2000: Public Support Remains Strong

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Solid support for nuclear energy continues into the new century. In this day of volatile public opinion on many topics, attitudes toward nuclear energy remain remarkably stable. There are signs that these attitudes could become even more favorable in the years ahead.

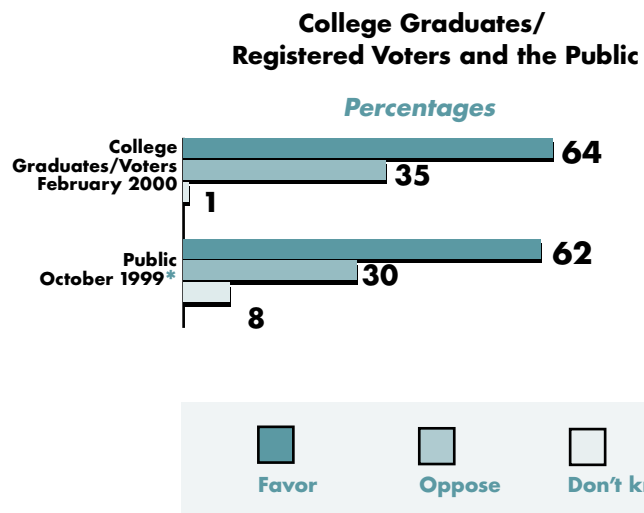
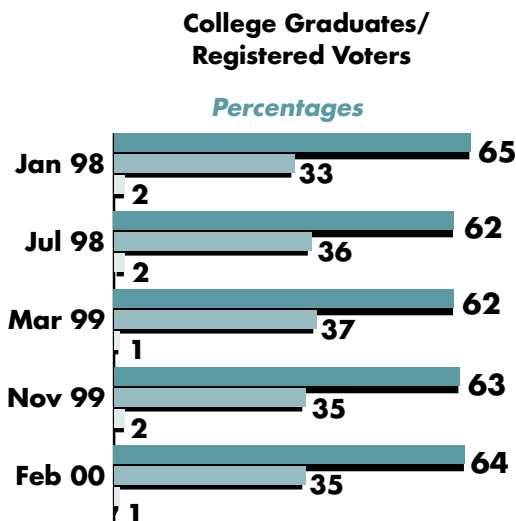
NEI sponsors periodic national tracking surveys of 500 college graduates who are registered to vote. The most recent survey was in February 2000. For comparison, NEI also surveys 1,000 members of the general adult public, most recently in October 1999 and in April 2000. Both types of surveys

are with nationally representative samples. The margin of error is plus or minus five percentage points for the college graduate samples and plus or minus three percentage points for the general public samples.

U.S. adults with favorable feelings about nuclear energy continue to outnumber those opposed by a wide margin. The results have been remarkably steady in surveys of college graduates/voters and the general public since the start of 1998.

TREND: ATTITUDES TOWARD NUCLEAR ENERGY

"Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity for the United States?"



* Data for the general public are from October 1999. Question not asked in the April 2000 survey.

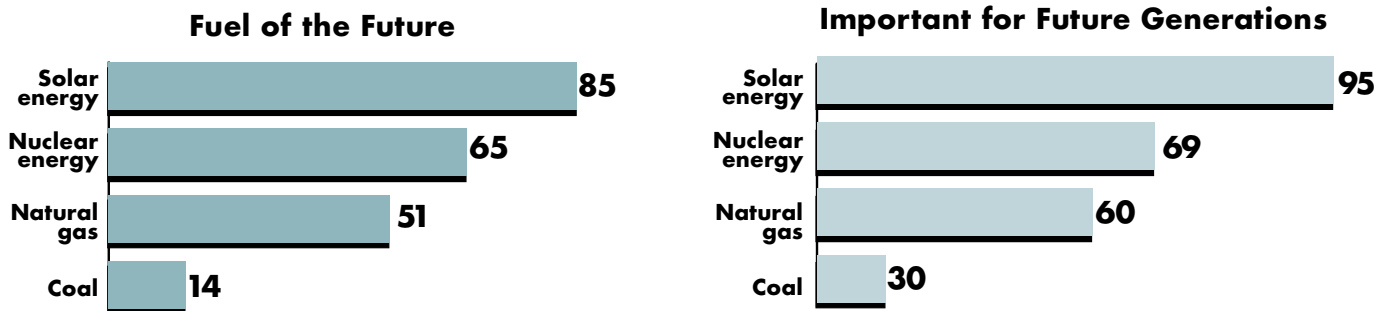
Important energy source for the future. One reason for the steady support for nuclear energy is the perception, which has persisted for decades, that nuclear energy is a “fuel of the future” and “important for future generations.” Americans tend to see solar and nuclear energy as sources of the future.

RATINGS OF SOURCES AS “FUEL OF THE FUTURE” AND “IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS”

“I’ll read some words and phrases and, for each one, please tell me how well it describes your feelings about [ENERGY SOURCE]. Use a zero to 10 scale. Zero means the phrase does not describe your feelings about [ENERGY SOURCE] at all. Ten means it describes your feelings completely. You can use any number from zero to 10.”

College Graduates/Registered Voters, February 2000

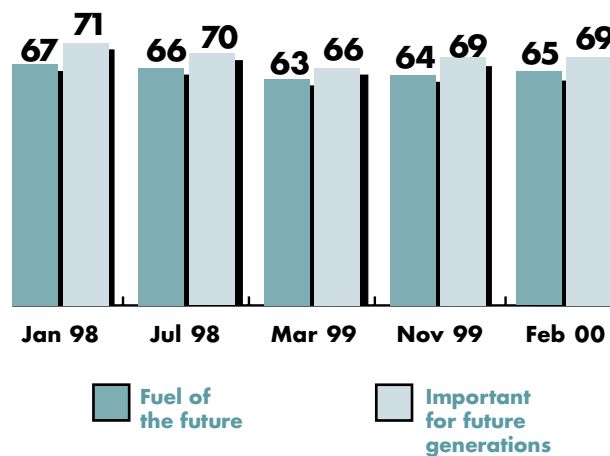
Percent Rating 6 to 10 on a 0-10 Scale



TREND: RATING NUCLEAR ENERGY’S FUTURE ROLE

College Graduates/Registered Voters

Percent Rating 6 to 10 on a 0-10 Scale



Nuclear Energy's Environmental Benefits

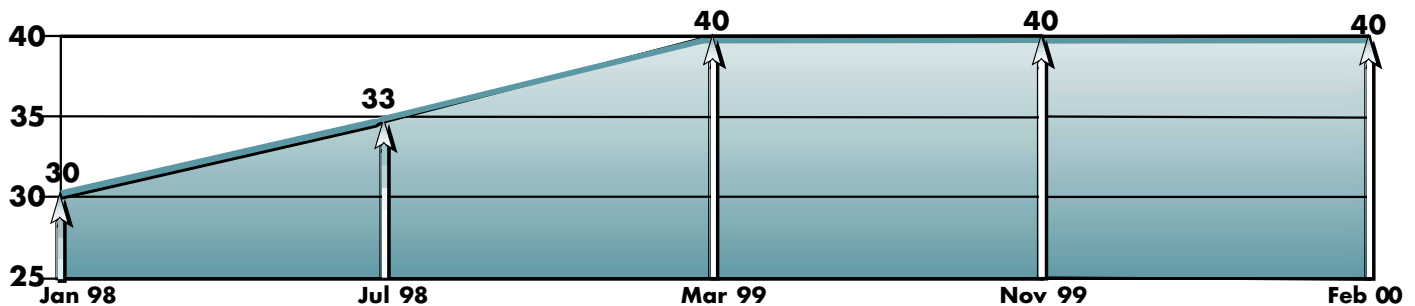
Advantage to protect the environment. As the link between energy and the environment becomes more obvious to the public, awareness of the role nuclear energy plays in preventing air pollution is likely to increase. Awareness started to increase in the years leading to the new century, but the majority of Americans still do not spontaneously connect nuclear energy and clean air.

Each survey of college graduates/registered voters asked for mentions of any advantages of nuclear energy that came to mind. In the three most recent surveys, 40 percent mentioned an environmental advantage such as clean air, compared with 30 percent in 1998.

TREND: PERCENT MENTIONING AN ENVIRONMENTAL ADVANTAGE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY

"Can you name any advantages of nuclear energy as a source of electricity?"

College Graduates/Registered Voters



Environmental awareness and favorable attitudes. As awareness of nuclear energy's clean air benefits grows, attitudes toward nuclear energy should become more favorable. NEI surveys consistently find that a single sentence of information about the environmental benefits of nuclear energy increases support for nuclear energy by about 10 percentage points. Significantly, those who strongly favor nuclear energy increase by two-thirds, while those who strongly oppose decrease by one-third.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS INFORMATION INCREASES FAVORABLE ATTITUDES

Information read to respondents: "There are more than 100 nuclear energy plants in the United States that generate one-fifth of all the electricity we use in the United States without emitting any greenhouse gases or other air pollutants."

College Graduates/Registered Voters, February 2000

	Before Hearing Information	After Hearing Information
	Percentages	
Favor	64	74
Oppose	35	24
Strongly favor	19	32
Somewhat favor	45	42
Somewhat oppose	21	15
Strongly oppose	14	9
Don't know	1	2

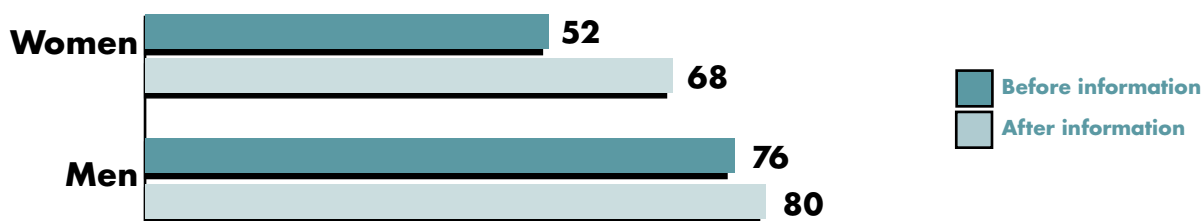
Women could have a large influence on future trends. Women are more undecided than men about nuclear energy and are more influenced after learning new information about clean air benefits.

PERCENT OF MEN AND WOMEN FAVORING NUCLEAR ENERGY BEFORE AND AFTER HEARING ABOUT CLEAN AIR BENEFITS

Information read to respondents: "There are more than 100 nuclear energy plants in the United States that generate one-fifth of all the electricity we use in the United States without emitting any greenhouse gases or other air pollutants."

College Graduates/Registered Voters, February 2000

Percent Who Favor Nuclear Energy



Greater Public Confidence in Safety

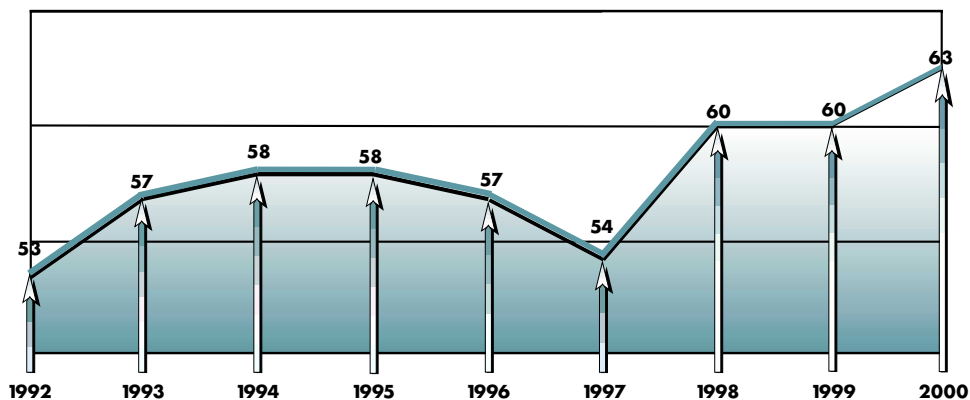
Public attitudes also are influenced by perceptions of safety. By the end of the past decade, the general public became more confident in their electric company's ability to operate a nuclear power plant safely, NEI surveys found.

This greater confidence may be due to growing familiarity with nuclear energy and also to the performance improvements at nuclear power plants over the past decade. Key indicators of performance excellence show continually improving trends.

TREND: CONFIDENCE THAT ELECTRIC COMPANY HAS THE ABILITY TO OPERATE A NUCLEAR POWER PLANT SAFELY (U.S. PUBLIC)

"Please tell me if you agree strongly, agree moderately, disagree moderately, or disagree strongly with the following statement. ...I am confident in the ability of my local electric company to operate a nuclear energy plant safely and correctly."

Percent Who Agree—Annual Averages



Support for Continued Plant Operations

Public consensus backing nuclear plant license renewal. Today, there is public consensus for renewing the operating licenses of nuclear power plants that meet federal safety standards. Electric companies have filed with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to extend the licenses for an additional 20 years, or 60 years total. The first two U.S. nuclear reactors—at Baltimore Gas and Electric’s Calvert Cliffs plant—received renewed licenses in March 2000. There is also broad support for the continued operation of existing nuclear power plants—there are currently 103 plants that generate 20 percent of the electricity in the United States—as well as for the option to build more in the future.

The one question about which the public remains somewhat divided is whether new nuclear power plants should definitely be built, although 51 percent of college graduates who are registered voters support building new nuclear power plants. Opinions on that question could become more supportive as electric power industry restructuring evolves, the need for electricity increases, familiarity with nuclear energy grows, nuclear plant performance remains steady or improves, and the clean air benefits of nuclear energy are more widely recognized.

Even if all these factors converge, it is hard to predict how quickly the *perceptions* of public opinion, as compared with actual public opinion, will change. NEI surveys continue to find that perceptions of public opinion about nuclear energy are significantly lower than actual support. Among the college graduates/voters surveyed in February 2000, 64 percent favored nuclear energy, but only 20 percent thought that people in their community shared their views.

“Please tell me if you personally strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements.”	College Graduates/ Registered Voters Feb 2000	Public Oct 1999*
	Percent Who Agree	
When their original operating license expires, we should renew the license of nuclear energy plants that continue to meet federal safety standards	87	79
We should keep our existing nuclear energy plants	76	73
We should keep the option to build more nuclear energy plants in the future	73	60
We should definitely build more nuclear energy plants in the future	51	42
We should shut down all nuclear energy plants	15	26

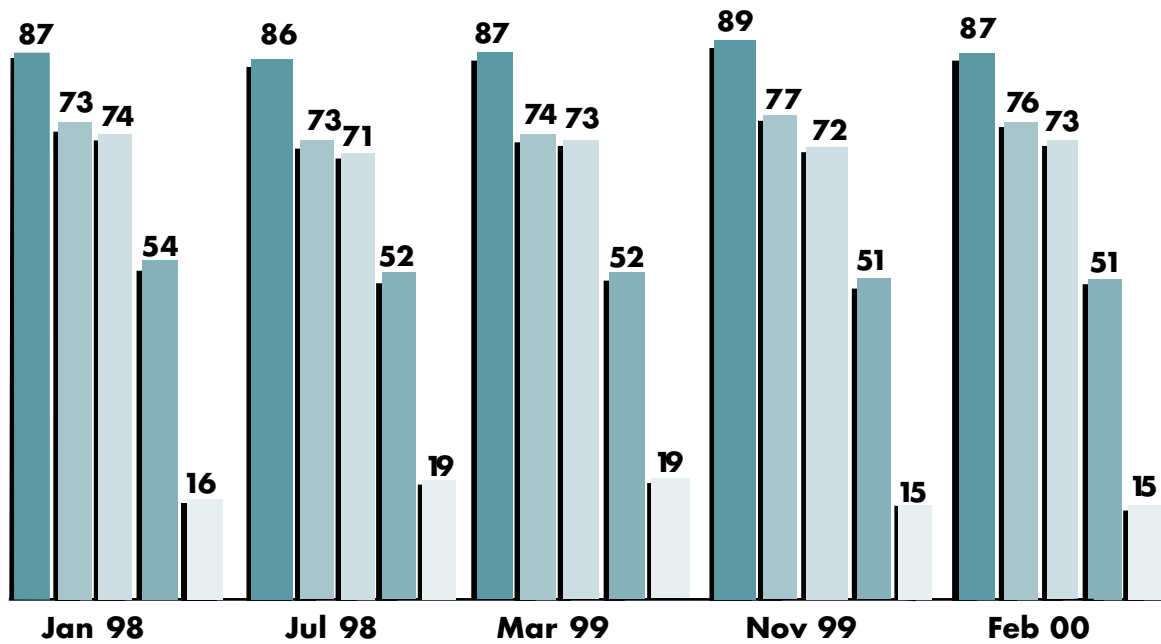
*Data for the general public are from October 1999. Question not asked in the April 2000 survey.

TREND: OPINIONS ON NUCLEAR ENERGY OPTIONS

"Please tell me if you personally strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements."

College Graduates/Registered Voters

Percent Who Agree



 Renew licenses

 Keep existing plants

 Keep option to build

 Definitely build more

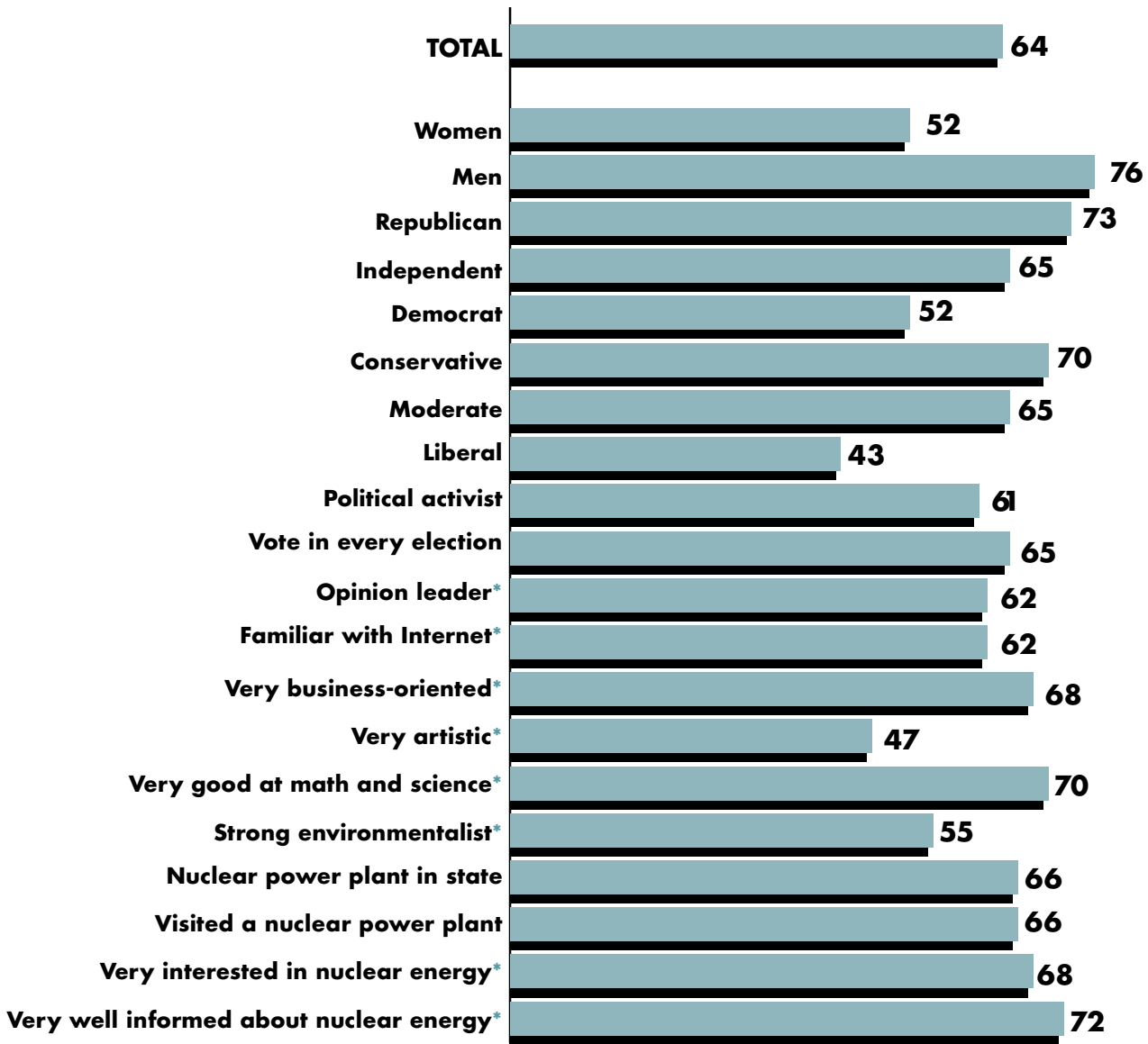
 Shut all plants

DEMOGRAPHICS: PERCENT WHO FAVOR NUCLEAR ENERGY

"Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity for the United States?"

College Graduates/Registered Voters, February 2000

Percent Favoring Nuclear Energy



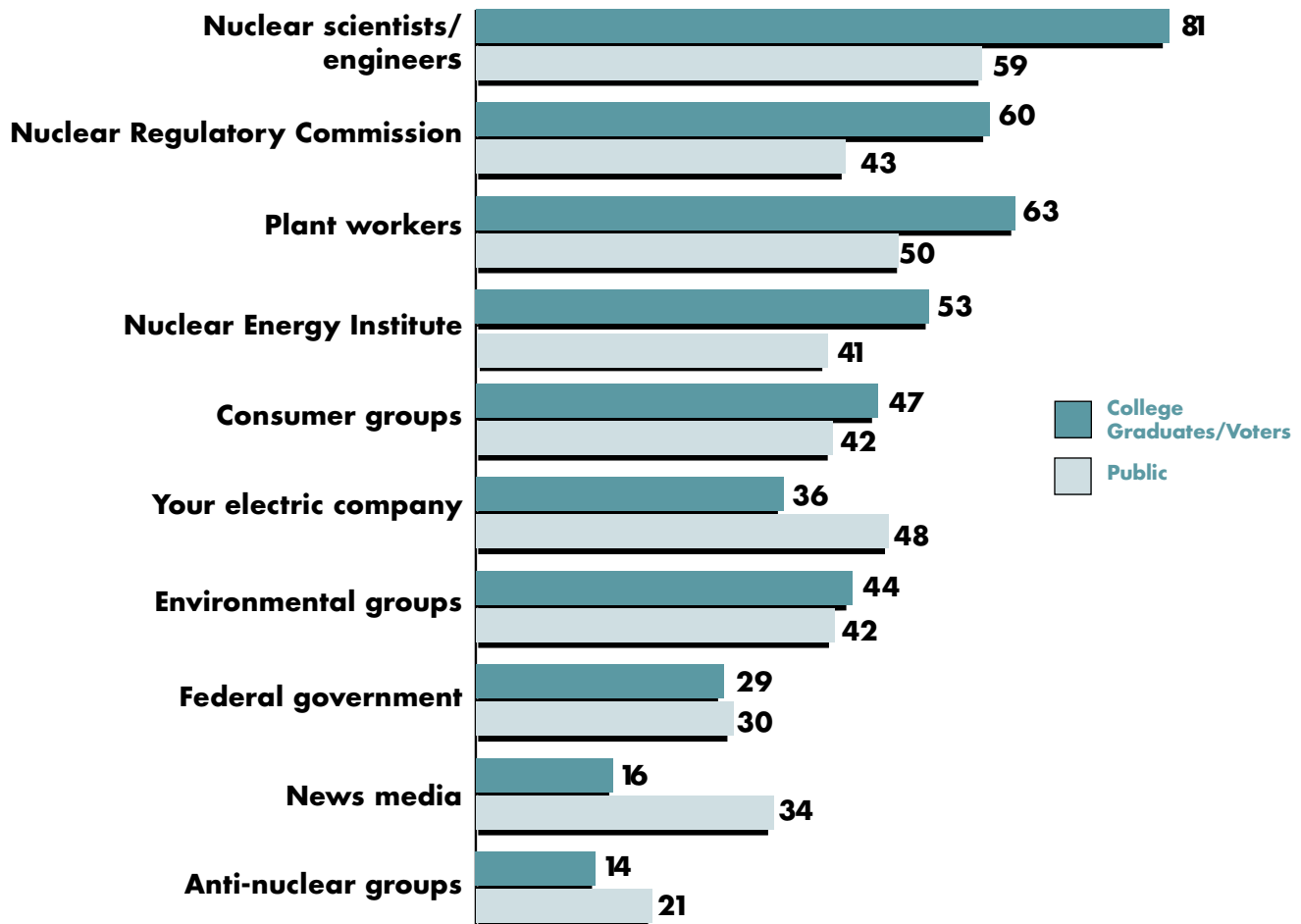
*Self-Described

CREDIBLE SOURCES ON NUCLEAR ENERGY

"How would you rate each of the following as a source of accurate information on nuclear energy issues? For each one, please tell me if you would consider it as an excellent, good, fair, or poor source of accurate information on nuclear energy issues..."

College Graduates/Registered Voters, February 2000
and the Public, April 2000

Percent Saying Excellent or Good Source of Accurate Information



NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE

